



The **Urban Forestry Office** will trim trees for height clearance issues and will remove dead or hazardous trees on City right-of-ways only. To request City tree attention, call the [311 Houston Service Center](tel:311). A City forester will evaluate all trees before any work is done.

Please note a permit is required before any City tree is removed, regardless of condition. This applies to trees in medians and along the grassy area between the sidewalk and the edge of the street. The area at the rear of your property is most likely a utility easement. The trees in this area will be trimmed by utility companies for the maintenance of their lines.

#### **Trimming Trees on Private Property:**

Trees and shrubs on your private property sometimes need to be shaped or trimmed, and doing so can be beneficial to them. Be careful when pruning to avoid serious damage to yourself or your trees and shrubs. If you would prefer to have a professional do the trimming, the International Society of Arboriculture has put together a list of industry-recognized standards for selecting a certified arborist. This information is available at [www.treesaregood.com](http://www.treesaregood.com).

#### **Reasons for Trimming Trees:**

While many plants and trees can live out their lives without ever needing to be pruned there are some signs that indicate the need for trimming including:

- To direct growth to avoid problems as the tree ages
- To maintain shape
- To remove damaged or diseased growth
- To improve future flowering or fruit production
- To prevent leggy growth
- To promote new growth by removing older wood
- To remove growth rubbing against buildings or power lines

#### **To Trim or Not to Trim:**

When to prune depends on the species of plant you intend to trim. Here are some pointers:

- Cut during winter or early spring to minimize the chance of damaging tender new growth.
- Do not trim immediately after new spring growth appears.
- Cutting branches during the summer may encourage the plant to put out new growth too late in the season for it to be hardy enough to take on winter weather.

#### **Tips for the Do-it-Yourselfer:**

If you intend to tackle the project yourself, plan carefully before you begin.

- Limit the number of cuts you will make as much as possible.
- First, remove all dead, diseased or damaged limbs by cutting them as closely as possible to the point of origin or back to a strong lateral branch.
- Look your project over closely, then stand back and take a more distant view. Is more pruning needed? If not, put your tools away and admire your work.

If you plan to train your tree or shrub to a particular shape, bear in mind the shape it would take in its natural state. The tree will reestablish its natural growth habits over time, so additional cuts will be required to maintain any unnatural plan you have in mind. You will be fighting nature, and nature has a long memory.

- Remove weak or narrow crotches and, where multiple branches sprout, cut out the less desirable ones to let the preferred one establish itself.
- Again, stand back and inspect your work as you go. Excessive pruning can damage or even kill a tree or shrub. If you have a huge pile of lopped branches around you, it might be better to stop and pick up your project next year. Don't stress out your tree!

Plants may benefit from a slight trimming at transplanting time. Pruning can compensate for root loss that occurs when a plant is dug up for replanting. If this is necessary, it is a good time to do any careful reshaping you may be considering.

Container-grown plants will probably not suffer root damage, though; this usually applies to bare-root or balled and burlap nursery stock. Don't go wild with the clippers!

### **The Right Tools for the Job:**

To tackle a pruning job correctly, you must have the correct tools, and they need to be properly maintained. A sharp edge is important, and it should be disinfected if you are working with diseased wood. Bleach mixed one part per nine parts water should handle most disinfectant jobs.

Power equipment such as chain saws make heavy tree trimming relatively easy, but can be dangerous for those not practiced in their use. Electric hedge trimmers are useful for handling large hedge projects, but manual ones are easier to control, especially if you are shearing plants into espaliered shapes.

Pruning saws are good for cutting branches, and differ from a carpenter's saw by having wider teeth, which cut quickly and lessen the chance of binding in mid-cut. Lopping shears are used for smaller branches, and hand shears work on stems less than an inch in diameter.

Scientists disagree on the question of wound dressing. Some feel painting a tree cut with pruning paint actually delays the healing process. However, if you use it, make sure you only coat the exposed wood and not the cambium layer between the wood and the bark, for this is where growth and healing occur.

Working with your trees and shrubs can be fun and rewarding, but keep your safety, and that of your plants, in mind!